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HOW much is Osama bin Laden worth? Does \$50 million sound about right?

Last week, the House passed, 414-0, the Counter-Terrorist and Narco-Terrorist Rewards Program Act. The bill, if it becomes law, would raise to \$50 million the maximum reward from the State Department's Rewards for Justice Program for information leading to Mr. bin Laden's capture. That is double the previous bounty and 10 times the reward offered six years ago.

But if \$25 million hasn't tempted a snitch, or at least a successful one, will \$50 million?

Only time will tell. Representative Mark S. Kirk, Republican of Illinois, one of three sponsors of the legislation, suggested that, because "a large part of Al Qaeda is being funded by the sale of heroin," the money might tempt drug dealers.

Mr. Kirk said that the biggest obstacle to recruiting informants in Afghanistan and Pakistan's northern autonomous regions, where Mr. bin Laden is thought to be hiding, is illiteracy.

In some villages 97 percent of the population can't read or write, limiting the effectiveness of rewards notices printed on matchbooks, posters and flyers.

The new bill provides money for radio and television ads. It would also allow bounties to be paid in the form of equipment, including tractors or trucks.

The rewards program, which was begun in the mid-1980's, has paid more than \$55 million dollars to 34 people, according to a State Department official.

The largest sum, \$30 million, was recently awarded to the informer who led the United States military to Saddam Hussein's sons, Uday and Qusay Hussein. The new millionaire was immediately evacuated from Iraq, the State Department official said.

For obvious reasons, many informants leave their country, said Mr. Kirk, adding that the United States actively helps to relocate them.

The person who turns in Mr. bin Laden would be wise to take the money and run, said Bruce Hoffman, a terrorist specialist at the RAND Corporation.

If identified, the person's entire family would be eliminated, he said. "Anyone taking a tractor should consider themselves marked."